

binding site which is complementary to one or more of the target gene RNA regions, and that it have nucleotide sequences within or surrounding that substrate binding site which impart an RNA cleaving activity to the molecule. Thus the ribozyme constructs need not be limited to specific motifs mentioned herein.

5 The invention provides a method for producing a class of enzymatic cleaving agents which exhibit a high degree of specificity for the RNA of a desired target. The enzymatic nucleic acid molecule is preferably targeted to a highly conserved sequence region of a target mRNA such that specific treatment of a disease or condition can be provided with either one or several enzymatic nucleic acids. Such enzymatic nucleic acid
10 molecules can be delivered exogenously to specific cells as required. Alternatively, the ribozymes can be expressed from DNA or RNA vectors that are delivered to specific cells.

Small enzymatic nucleic acid motifs (*e.g.*, of the hammerhead or the hairpin structure) may be used for exogenous delivery. The simple structure of these molecules
15 increases the ability of the enzymatic nucleic acid to invade targeted regions of the mRNA structure. Alternatively, catalytic RNA molecules can be expressed within cells from eukaryotic promoters (*e.g.*, Scanlon *et al.*, 1991; Kashani-Sabet *et al.*, 1992; Dropulic *et al.*, 1992; Weerasinghe *et al.*, 1991; Ojwang *et al.*, 1992; Chen *et al.*, 1992; Sarver *et al.*, 1990). Those skilled in the art realize that any ribozyme can be expressed in
20 eukaryotic cells from the appropriate DNA vector. The activity of such ribozymes can be augmented by their release from the primary transcript by a second ribozyme (Draper *et al.*, Int. Pat. Appl. Publ. No. WO 93/23569, and Sullivan *et al.*, Int. Pat. Appl. Publ. No. WO 94/02595, both hereby incorporated in their totality by reference herein; Ohkawa *et al.*, 1992; Taira *et al.*, 1991; Ventura *et al.*, 1993).

25 Ribozymes may be added directly, or can be complexed with cationic lipids, lipid complexes, packaged within liposomes, or otherwise delivered to target cells. The RNA or RNA complexes can be locally administered to relevant tissues *ex vivo*, or *in vivo* through injection, aerosol inhalation, infusion pump or stent, with or without their incorporation in biopolymers.

Ribozymes may be designed as described in Draper *et al.* (Int. Pat. Appl. Publ. No. WO 93/23569), or Sullivan *et al.*, (Int. Pat. Appl. Publ. No. WO 94/02595) and synthesized to be tested *in vitro* and *in vivo*, as described. Such ribozymes can also be optimized for delivery. While specific examples are provided, those in the art will recognize that equivalent RNA targets in other species can be utilized when necessary.

Hammerhead or hairpin ribozymes may be individually analyzed by computer folding (Jaeger *et al.*, 1989) to assess whether the ribozyme sequences fold into the appropriate secondary structure. Those ribozymes with unfavorable intramolecular interactions between the binding arms and the catalytic core are eliminated from consideration. Varying binding arm lengths can be chosen to optimize activity. Generally, at least 5 bases on each arm are able to bind to, or otherwise interact with, the target RNA.

Ribozymes of the hammerhead or hairpin motif may be designed to anneal to various sites in the mRNA message, and can be chemically synthesized. The method of synthesis used follows the procedure for normal RNA synthesis as described in Usman *et al.* (1987) and in Scaringe *et al.* (1990) and makes use of common nucleic acid protecting and coupling groups, such as dimethoxytrityl at the 5'-end, and phosphoramidites at the 3'-end. Average stepwise coupling yields are typically >98%. Hairpin ribozymes may be synthesized in two parts and annealed to reconstruct an active ribozyme (Chowrira and Burke, 1992). Ribozymes may be modified extensively to enhance stability by modification with nuclease resistant groups, for example, 2'-amino, 2'-C-allyl, 2'-fluoro, 2'-O-methyl, 2'-H (for a review see Usman and Cedergren, 1992). Ribozymes may be purified by gel electrophoresis using general methods or by high pressure liquid chromatography and resuspended in water.

Ribozyme activity can be optimized by altering the length of the ribozyme binding arms, or chemically synthesizing ribozymes with modifications that prevent their degradation by serum ribonucleases (see e.g., Int. Pat. Appl. Publ. No. WO 92/07065; Perrault *et al.*, 1990; Pieken *et al.*, 1991; Usman and Cedergren, 1992; Int. Pat. Appl. Publ. No. WO 93/15187; Int. Pat. Appl. Publ. No. WO 91/03162; Eur. Pat. Appl. Publ. No. 92110298.4; U.S. Patent 5,334,711; and Int. Pat. Appl. Publ. No. WO 94/13688,

which describe various chemical modifications that can be made to the sugar moieties of enzymatic RNA molecules), modifications which enhance their efficacy in cells, and removal of stem II bases to shorten RNA synthesis times and reduce chemical requirements.

5 Sullivan *et al.* (Int. Pat. Appl. Publ. No. WO 94/02595) describes the general methods for delivery of enzymatic RNA molecules. Ribozymes may be administered to cells by a variety of methods known to those familiar to the art, including, but not restricted to, encapsulation in liposomes, by iontophoresis, or by incorporation into other vehicles, such as hydrogels, cyclodextrins, biodegradable nanocapsules, and bioadhesive microspheres. For some indications, ribozymes may be directly delivered *ex vivo* to cells or tissues with or without the aforementioned vehicles. Alternatively, the RNA/vehicle combination may be locally delivered by direct inhalation, by direct injection or by use of a catheter, infusion pump or stent. Other routes of delivery include, but are not limited to, intravascular, intramuscular, subcutaneous or joint injection, aerosol inhalation, oral (tablet or pill form), topical, systemic, ocular, intraperitoneal and/or intrathecal delivery. More detailed descriptions of ribozyme delivery and administration are provided in Sullivan *et al.* (Int. Pat. Appl. Publ. No. WO 94/02595) and Draper *et al.* (Int. Pat. Appl. Publ. No. WO 93/23569) which have been incorporated by reference herein.

20 Another means of accumulating high concentrations of a ribozyme(s) within cells is to incorporate the ribozyme-encoding sequences into a DNA expression vector. Transcription of the ribozyme sequences are driven from a promoter for eukaryotic RNA polymerase I (pol I), RNA polymerase II (pol II), or RNA polymerase III (pol III). Transcripts from pol II or pol III promoters will be expressed at high levels in all cells; the levels of a given pol II promoter in a given cell type will depend on the nature of the gene regulatory sequences (enhancers, silencers, *etc.*) present nearby. Prokaryotic RNA polymerase promoters may also be used, providing that the prokaryotic RNA polymerase enzyme is expressed in the appropriate cells (Elroy-Stein and Moss, 1990; Gao and Huang, 1993; Lieber *et al.*, 1993; Zhou *et al.*, 1990). Ribozymes expressed from such promoters can function in mammalian cells (*e.g.* Kashani-Saber *et al.*, 1992; Ojwang *et al.*, 1992; Chen *et al.*, 1992; Yu *et al.*, 1993; L'Huillier *et al.*, 1992; Lisziewicz *et al.*,

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